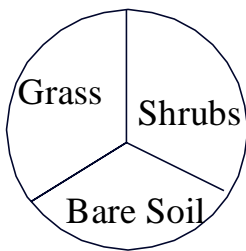




THE COVEY HEADQUARTERS

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This newsletter is aimed at cooperators and sports-people in Missouri to provide information on restoring quail. This is a joint effort of the Missouri Department of Conservation, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, and University of Missouri Extension. If you would like to be removed from this mailing list or have suggestions for future articles please contact jeff.powelson@mdc.mo.gov or 816-232-6555 x122 or write to the address shown.



The name of this newsletter is taken from an old concept.....that a quail covey operates from a headquarters (shrubby cover). If the rest of the covey's habitat needs are nearby, a covey should be present. We are encouraging landowners to manage their quail habitat according to this concept. Use **shrubs** as the cornerstone for your quail management efforts. Manage for a **diverse grass, broadleaf weed and legume mixture and provide bare ground** with row crops, food plots or light disking **right next to** the shrubby area.

Prairie chicken tracked on 1,165-mile journey in Missouri and Iowa

A female prairie chicken wearing a GPS tracking collar surprised and puzzled biologists this summer by traveling 1,165 miles in big circles in southern Iowa and northern Missouri. The hen labeled Bird No. 112 was trapped in western Nebraska and released on April 4 in Iowa near the Missouri border, north of Bethany, Mo., for a prairie chicken restoration program. Since then, she has avoided fatal dangers such as predators, vehicles, fences and utility lines in a ceaseless journey that has slowed but not stopped.

"We don't really know why," said Jennifer A. Vogel, who has monitored Bird No. 112's travels as a post-doctoral research associate at Iowa State University. "It seems like she was searching for something."

Bird No. 112's travels include: a northerly jaunt in Iowa after her release; a southerly loop into Missouri and then north back into Iowa; a visit to St. Joseph on Missouri's western boundary; a swing east past Kirksville in the state's north central region; a move back to Iowa and then flights past the bridges of Madison County southwest of Des Moines; a second trip to St. Joseph; a second visit to the Trenton, Mo., area; then a slow march back through northwest Missouri into Iowa where on July 29 she was feeding and nesting a couple of counties north of the state line near Kent, Iowa.

"It's neat that she's capable of traveling that far, but we hope all the hens don't do that or we won't get any reproduction," said Len Gilmore, a wildlife management biologist for the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) who studies prairie chickens.

Biologists are not sure if some prairie chickens have always moved these distances, which would boost genetic diversity. Or, hen No. 112 may be looking for other prairie chickens and a landscape more resembling arid western Nebraska. Prairie chickens are endangered in Missouri. They were extirpated from Iowa by 1952 with only re-introduced birds there now in limited numbers.

Slightly more than 100 prairie chickens remain in Missouri where once hundreds of thousands once roamed. Their decline is primarily because less than one percent of the state's native grasslands remain.

Most of those birds are in two flocks in west central Missouri. MDC bolstered their numbers and genetic diversity in recent years with birds translocated from Kansas.

The good news is that a flock re-established at the Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie near El Dorado Springs, Mo., is holding steady with 40 to 50 prairie chickens. They had good nesting success this spring, said Tom Thompson, an MDC resource scientist. A couple of Kansas birds released at Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie in 2012 also did some traveling that surprised biologists.

One hen outfitted with a radio transmitter traveled south to Dade County this spring. She joined a male dubbed earlier as "Lonesome Chuck." He was a lone survivor of the species at the prairie on the Wade and June Shelton Memorial Conservation Area. They produced offspring (13 eggs hatched) and the hen is still alive and being tracked by biologists.



Another hen with a transmitter journeyed northwest of El Dorado Springs to a prairie remnant in Bates County and hatched chicks. She was later killed by an undetermined cause. But biologists see it as a positive sign that prairie chickens are not rooted to where they're hatched or released, and that they will travel 30 to 50 miles to seek out remnant prairies or previously used leks, which are spring mating grounds.

"It's encouraging to see that the birds from Wah'Kon-Tah can make it that far," Thompson said.

The perilous, cross-state travel by Bird No. 112 in northwest Missouri is another matter. However, she may not be the only Nebraska-trapped bird roaming a long distance, but rather just the only one that biologists can track cross country. Iowa placed 10 solar-powered GPS satellite transmitters on hens released this spring. Only Bird No. 112 survives, as the others were killed by predators.

Bird No. 112 was among 73 prairie chickens from Nebraska released this spring in the Grand River Grasslands prairie focus area that spans the Iowa and Missouri state line. The 70,000 acre project is a partnership between MDC, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, private landowners and several other public and private conservation partners. Dunn Ranch, owned by The Nature Conservancy of Missouri, was the release point for birds on the Missouri side.

MDC staff attached radio transmitters to 16 hens that were released at Dunn Ranch along with seven males without radio collars. Tracking the hens helps biologists learn what kind of habitat prairie chickens prefer and what they need for nesting and brood rearing success. That information will guide habitat management decisions in the future.

However, the tracking collars used by MDC are not connected to satellites like those used on the hens released in Iowa. Staff must track those birds using antennas at relatively close range or with aircraft flyovers.

Three of the hens with MDC collars nested in the release area and two produced successful hatches. It's positive that some of the Nebraska-trapped birds released this spring joined a handful of prairie chickens that were already using the Dunn Ranch lek, Thompson said.

But 10 hens with radio collars moved out of the area and their fate is unknown, said David Hoover, an MDC wildlife biologist. They may be on a long journey like Bird No. 112, or perhaps a shorter trip, and they hopefully will return. Bird No. 112 has passed south of the Dunn Ranch area twice.

"We're still hoping they will show back up and produce broods," Hoover said.

HERO FOR A DAY

Brandon Wirsig, Private Land Conservationist, Dexter

On June 15th the Bootheel Bobwhites Quail Forever chapter participated in a conservation field day which will be showcased by Field and Stream. This event was a joint partnership between Field and Stream, Quail Forever, Missouri Department of Conservation, American Bird Conservancy and one lucky private landowner. Field and Stream has promoted similar events across the nation titled "Hero for a Day" in an effort to get volunteers out in the field. This event provided a great opportunity to educate people about quail and it also provided an opportunity to put quality habitat on the ground.

Early in the morning of June 15th volunteers assisted the Department of Conservation and the American Bird Conservancy with breeding bird surveys on Crowley's Ridge Conservation Area. These surveys provide good data which can be compared to fall quail covey count data so that land managers can estimate survival of bobwhite quail over the winter. These surveys provide insight to the success of management efforts on Crowley's Ridge CA and adjoining private land. Following the breeding bird surveys on Crowley's Ridge CA, volunteers worked to create additional woody cover on adjacent private land. Work included creation of one large downed tree structure and edge feathering of trees over 15' tall. The downed tree structure was created by moving tree tops from the field edge toward the center of the field. This will provide quail an opportunity to utilize a larger percentage of the field while still maintaining a reasonable distance to good woody cover. Edge feathering was completed adjacent to the field to provide good woody cover and to maximize edge where quail are more likely to frequent. The edge feathering should also promote beneficial shrubs such as blackberry and plum which will provide food and cover for quail in the future.

All told, 17 volunteers showed up to participate in the Hero for a Day event. Volunteers operated chainsaws and Polaris Rangers to relocate tree tops, applied herbicide, collected data and provided feedback to Field and Stream staff about the project. For short video about the event, check out

<http://www.fieldandstream.com/hero-for-a-day>.



Special quail hunts set for Cover Prairie C.A. and Davidson-Paris W. A.

Hunting quail on public land can be frustrating. Quail that do not succumb to the gun became very difficult to hunt—they hide in heavy woody cover, neighboring private land, and they run and flush wild. To improve your chance of finding quail, the Missouri Department of Conservation restricts hunting pressure on select Conservation Areas. On two areas in Howell County, public use is limited to a handful of days, and only one hunting party each of those days. MDC is accepting applications for special quail hunts on the Dan and Maureen Cover Prairie Conservation Area and the Carrick W. Davidson- Robert G. Paris Wildlife Area, both near West Plains.

Permits for the hunts will be issued by lottery. Applicants may apply for only one of the areas. Successful applicants will be given a one day permit to hunt on the area selected, during the assigned time period. There will be 18 hunts on Cover Prairie C.A. and 8 hunts on Davidson-Paris W.A. Each

successful applicant will be allowed to take three other hunters, and they will have the area to themselves. Each party will be allowed to take four quail.

To apply for these special hunts, contact: Missouri Department of Conservation, Special Quail Hunts, 551 Joe Jones Blvd., West Plains, MO 65775 or call 417-256-7161. All applicants must include the area on which they wish to hunt, the applicants name, permanent mailing address, phone number and the names of no more than three additional people who will be in the hunting party. No person's name may be listed on more than two permits. Applications will be accepted from Sept. 1 thru Sept. 30. Successful applicants will be notified by mail by Oct. 15.

Conduct Covey Counts in October

A great way to get an idea of how many coveys your farm has is to perform a quail covey count in October. Fall covey whistling lasts only a few minutes before day-break, and gives an estimate of production and pre-hunting season conditions. Generally you will not hear the familiar "bobwhite" during the fall calling period. The covey call is a clear loud whistle vocalized as "koi-lee." Listen carefully because the call typically lasts only 30 seconds. [Click here for an audio version of the fall covey call.](#)



Choose listening stations by studying maps and aerial photos. The maximum distance a quail whistle can be heard is 800 yards, but on average, 547 yards is the limit, so space listening stations 1,000 yards apart. This will reduce the possibility of counting the same cove more than once. With a 547-yard listening radius, you are theoretically hearing quail in a 194-acre circle around you. If trees or topography limit your ability to hear quail whistling 547 yards away, listening stations can be closer together. Put listening stations on ridgetops to maximize the area you survey each morning.

Permanently mark your listening stations so they can be used every year. Listen only on clear and calm mornings starting at 45 minutes prior to sunrise during the last 3 weeks of October. Listen until about 10 minutes before sunrise. For best results, be consistent in the way you collect data. Remember to keep track of all data and keep it on file for year-to-year comparison.

Ragweed.....bane for allergies but #1 wild quail food in Missouri!!

There are numerous definitions of a weed, including:

- a plant out of place and not intentionally sown.
- a plant growing where it is not wanted.
- a plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered. (R.W. Emerson)
- and many others

Whatever your definition, ragweed is a weed to most people, but to quail and quail managers it is free food and cover.

Common ragweed seedlings emerge from May through July. Flowering parts are formed from July to September, and seeds mature from



August to October. The pollen that is produced and distributed in abundant quantities from early August until frost is the cause of most of the hay fever in the late summer and fall

Seeds have several longitudinal ridges ending in short spines (similar to a crown). You can buy expensive ragweed seed to plant believe it or not.....but nature has probably already planted it for you. All you have to do is manage for it. Survival of seeds has been noted to last 80 years. The best management for ragweed includes fall disking, spraying and summer, fall or wintertime burning. It relishes disturbance...just like quail.

In late summers, when there has been adequate moisture many pastures will have a solid canopy of ragweed. And you will see many farmers mowing their pastures. But it is only a cosmetic solution. The ragweed has produced seed by then and mowing doesn't solve the problem. We have many reports from people, who do mow the ragweed in pastures, that they see lots of quail.....studies have shown it is the most popular natural quail food in Missouri and it has the proper structure to provide fall and winter roosting for coveys. Don't mow it.....leave it for the birds!! Just remember that many four letter words....like 'WEED'.....are good for quail.

Want to get your newsletter delivered faster?

The Covey Headquarters Newsletter is published 4 times per year. We post it to the MDC website and send a copy to our e-mail list about a month earlier than the printed version gets delivered in the mail. Go to the following website - http://mdc.mo.gov/user_mailman_register to subscribe to the Covey Headquarters Newsletter via e-mail and get your issue delivered faster. Folks on the e-mail list received this issue by September 1. There are several news releases, newsletters and periodicals listed on this website. Be sure to click "yes" on "Covey Headquarters" to start receiving your issue by e-mail. If you would like to be taken off the print version, please send an e-mail to the address listed at the top of this newsletter.

Did You Know???

Kids will get the first chance at quail and pheasant in Missouri this fall. The youth-only quail and pheasant season will occur October 26-27, 2013. The season is open to youth age 6 through 15. Youths who are not hunter-ed certified must hunt in the immediate presence of a properly licensed adult; however, the adult may not hunt during this special 2-day event. Kids with hunter-ed training can take to the fields on their own. For full details on the season, check the Conservation Department website www.mdc.mo.gov or contact your nearest regional office.



Mark Your Calendar

Prescribed Burn Workshops

October 15, 2013 from 5:30 to 9PM at the Pettis County USDA Service Center, 1407 West 32nd St. Sedalia. This free course will provide basic practical information for safely conducting prescribed burns. Participants will gain a familiarization with prescribed burning tools and techniques for habitat management. This course may be especially helpful to landowners required to complete management on land enrolled in the federal CRP or EQIP programs. Light refreshments will be provided. Please RSVP by October 1st by calling 660-826-3339 x3.

November 2, 2013 from 9AM to 4PM at the Sullivan Fire House, Station 5, 1230 N. Church St., Sullivan. Morning classroom session learning proper prescribed fire techniques. Lunch provided with a demo burn after lunch, weather permitting. Bring appropriate clothing if you wish to participate in the demo burn – leather gloves, leather boots, fire-retardant outerwear made of cotton, wool or other natural fibers or Nomex. Registration required, contact Lia Heppermann at 636-583-2303 x115.

Survey Says!

Bill White, Private Land Services Chief, Jefferson City

This past June, I joined dozens of volunteers in seven states piloting a national effort to inventory habitat conditions and bird populations within designated quail focus areas.

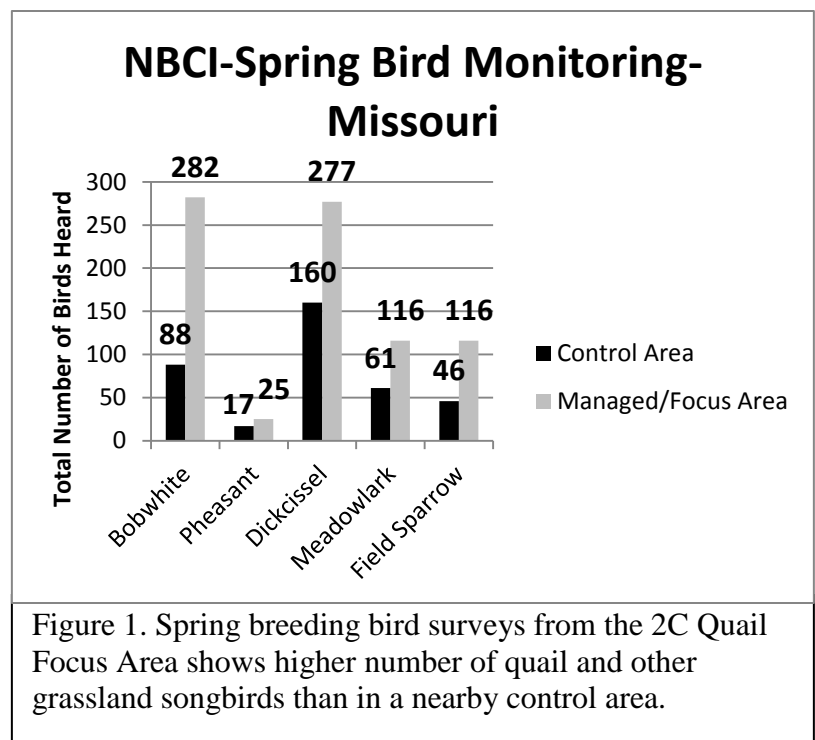
This national pilot project is coordinated through the [National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative](#). These seven states are testing a combination of bird and habitat monitoring that will eventually be used by the 25 states with bobwhite quail. The aim is to tie habitat improvements to bird populations in a coordinated multi-state effort. These surveys are taking place in designated quail focus areas (QFA) where agencies and partners are focusing efforts to restore quail habitat. Some QFAs will be primarily public land, while others will primarily be private land.

In Missouri's case, we have chosen 5200 acres of private land in northwest Missouri where quail habitat management has been intensified through incentives and assistance to landowners by Missouri Department of Conservation staff and Quail Forever volunteers since 2005. Private landowners in the QFA have installed habitat improvements such as 15 miles of edge feathering, over 770 acres of quail-friendly grass and wildflower plantings, and used prescribed burning on 200 acres each year. These practices were implemented through USDA Farm Bill programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program and through funding provided by the 2C Chapter of Quail Forever and the Missouri Department of Conservation. Technical assistance was provided to landowners by the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Missouri Department of Conservation.

We compare what we find in the focus area to a similar control area outside the focus area that is not being managed for quail by the landowners. The results are telling the same story that we have been touting for several years regarding Bobwhite Quail. "It's the habitat!" The effort of this partnership with landowners looks like it is making a difference for quail and other wildlife. Our surveys indicate over 3 times more male quail were calling in our focus area than the nearby control (Figure 1).

There were also more of the key declining grassland songbirds; dickcissels, eastern meadowlarks and field sparrows. These were not all of the songbirds calling in the area, but key species we are looking for in our focus area. We have always been confident that quail habitat management improves songbird populations, and this survey provides the evidence.

During our survey we had several listening points where there were so many quail and songbirds calling that it was hard to keep track. Looking around these points, it was evident that habitat improvements had taken place. But even within the focus area, we saw the absence of quail and songbirds at those few survey points surrounded by fescue or Reed's canarygrass. Habitat is the key!



Time to Treat Fescue and Brome

Fall is a great time to eliminate brome and fescue. Fall chemical (glyphosate) treatments work well because plants are naturally moving energy into underground root storage and happen to take the chemical ingredients with them. Treat fescue and brome after a hard frost (typically by the end of October). Wait for a day above 60 degrees and then spray under edge feathered areas, native shrub thickets and shrub plantings. **Take caution when spraying around shrubs like blackberry and raspberry as glyphosate can severely stunt or kill them even after leaf drop.**

Know where you will be edge feathering this winter? Spray adjacent to these trees now and let the trees drop into the treated area. Below is a picture of some edge feathering completed in January 2013. The adjacent brome was sprayed using an ATV-mounted boom-less sprayer before the trees were dropped in early November 2012. The brome was almost eliminated and ragweed and many other annual weeds were stimulated adjacent and within the edge feathering. This new habitat will provide good food and cover within walking distance for quail. It is also excellent rabbit habitat. Fescue and brome are prolific seed producers and it may be necessary to complete a second treatment in early spring or again the following fall.



Did You Know???

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation has just released a new quail habitat guide. Follow this link to find it - www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/Quailhabitatguide.pdf

Covey Headquarter Management Calendar

September

Begin burning prairie or native grass plantings to encourage wildflowers and set back rank grass
Till firebreaks and new food plots
Finish treating sericea lespedeza
Broadcast alfalfa and wheat into tilled firebreaks


October

Conduct quail covey counts 45 minutes before sunrise on clear calm mornings
Most USDA Conservation Programs will announce new ranking periods after October 1
Spray native grass plantings for invading brome and fescue after a killing frost
Prepare ground for spring shrub plantings

November

Basal spray undesirable trees according to herbicide label now through March
Order your covey headquarter shrubs from the MDC nursery through May - blackberry, grey/roughleaf dogwood, and wild plum, are best for quail
Begin edge feathering operations and construct downed tree structures

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